

Main Issues

- “Exceptional” imperative constructions are cited one language at a time.
 - Past tense imperatives
 - Negative commands with a dummy imperative verb
- Rare, but occur in several languages.

Proposal

- “Exceptional” constructions encode ordinary semantic meaning.
 - Past tense imperatives → counterfactual preferences
 - Dummy imperative verbs → grammaticalized illocutionary meaning

Preference Semantics

- Dynamic semantic system
- Builds on Inquisitive Semantics (Groenendijk and Roelofsen 2009)
 - “declaratives provide information by eliminating worlds ... interrogatives introduce alternatives by grouping those worlds into sets, *imperatives order alternatives.*”
 (Starr 2012:2, emphasis original)

	Sentence type	Preference added
▷	declarative	$\langle p, \emptyset \rangle$
?	interrogative	
	polar question	$\langle p, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \neg p, \emptyset \rangle$
	Wh-question	$\langle p, \emptyset \rangle, \langle q, \emptyset \rangle, \langle r, \emptyset \rangle, \dots$
!	imperative	$\langle p, \neg p \rangle$

***Declarative Update* ▷p** (Starr 2012:27)

1. Take every preference in R and intersect both of its members with p
2. “Highlight” the asserted proposition by adding the preference $\langle p, \emptyset \rangle$

$$R[\triangleright p] = \{ \langle a[p], a'[p] \rangle \mid \langle a, a' \rangle \in R : a[p] = \emptyset \} \cup \{ \langle c_R[p], \emptyset \rangle \}$$

***Imperative Update* !p** (Starr 2012:26)

1. Admit all of the preferences in R
2. Introduce a global preference for all the p -worlds over the $\neg p$ -worlds
3. Introduce local preferences within the already existing alternatives in R

$$R[!p] = R \cup \{ \langle c_R[p], c_R - c_R[p] \rangle \} \cup \{ \langle a[p], a - a[p] \rangle \mid a \in C_R \ \& \ a[p] = \emptyset \}$$

Past Tense Imperatives

- (1) *Syrian Arabic* (Cowell 1964; Palmer 1986)
kənt kōl lamma kənt fəl-bēt
you.were eat+IMP when you.were in.the-house
“You should have eaten when you were at home.”
- (2) *Estonian* (Aikhenvald 2010)
tulnud õhtul õigel ajal koju
come+PAST=OPT evening+LOC.SG right+LOC.SG time+LOC.SG home
“You should have come at a proper time in the evening.”
- (3) *Dutch* (Mastop 2005)
Had je telefoonnummer dan ook niet aan die vent gegeven!
Had your phone-number then also not to that guy give-PP
“You shouldn’t have given your phone number to that guy.”

Past Tense Preferences

- Preference semantics permits counterfactual preferences (preferences which prefer propositions known to be untrue).
- The ability to prefer a past-tense proposition is a **morphosyntactic issue**.

(4) *Have read the book!

(5) Read the book yesterday!
≈You should have read the book already. (in proper context)

- An utterance of (1) prefers a proposition e , “[the addressee] ate when [they] were at home”
- (1) is felicitous in a context where $\neg e$ is common ground.

$$R_0 = \{\langle W, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle\}$$

$$R_1 = R_0[!e] = \{\langle W, \emptyset \rangle, \langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle, \langle e, \neg e \rangle\}$$

- The inclusion of the **global preference** $\langle e, \neg e \rangle$ in R_1 is licit even though $\langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle, \langle e, \neg e \rangle$ cannot both be satisfied \rightarrow **counterfactual interpretation**.
- N.B.: the **local preference** $\langle \neg e, \emptyset \rangle = \langle \emptyset, \emptyset \rangle$; this null preference is ignored.
- Uttering (1) in a context where e is common ground is less felicitous, because it introduces a redundant, non-null preference $\langle e, \emptyset \rangle$.
- The converse holds for (3), which prefers $\langle \neg g, g \rangle$.

Dummy Imperative Verbs

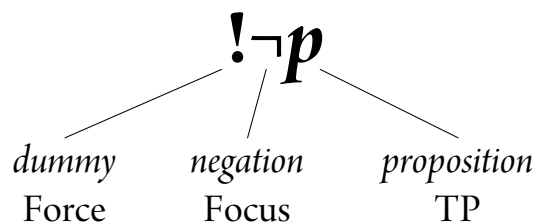
- (6) *Serbo-Croatian* (Szucsich 2010)
Nemoj-te čita-ti novin-e!
NEGIMP.2.PL read-INF papers-F.PL.ACC
“Don’t read newspapers!”

(7) **Latin** (Croft 1991)
 nōli amābō verberāre lapidem
 NEG.want.IMP I.pray beat.INF stone.ACC
 “Don’t beat a stone.”

(8) **Welsh** (Willis 2013)
 Paid â gadael!
 NEG.2S with leave.INF
 “Don’t leave!”

Dummy Verbs are Non-Propositional

- Derived from verbs that originally meant ‘can’ (6), ‘want’ (7), and ‘stop’ (8).
- (6) ≠ “Don’t be able to read newspapers!”
- Dummy verbs are in the left periphery
 - attached to negation (6–7)
 - supplanting negation (8)
- Syntactically absorb imperative agreement.
- Semantically encode imperative force.



References

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2010. *Imperatives and commands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cowell, Mark. 1964. *A reference grammar of Syrian Arabic*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Croft, William. 1991. The evolution of negation. *Journal of Linguistics* 27:1, 1–27.
- Groenendijk, Jeroen, and Floris Roelofsen. 2009. Inquisitive semantics and pragmatics. In *Meaning, content and argument: Proceedings of the ILCLI International Workshop on Semantics, Pragmatics, and Rhetoric*, ed. J.M. Larrazabal and L. Zubeldia, 41–72. San Sebastián: Universidad del País Vasco, Servicio Editorial.
- Mastop, Rosja. 2005. *What can you do?: Imperative mood in semantic theory*. Amsterdam: Institute for Logic, Language and Computation.
- Palmer, Frank. 1986. *Mood and modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Starr, William B. 2012. A preference semantics for imperatives. Ms., Cornell University.
- Szucsich, Luka. 2010. Mood in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. In *Mood in the Languages of Europe*, ed. Björn Rothstein and Rolf Thieroff. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Willis, David. 2013. The history of negation in the Brythonic Celtic languages. In *The history of negation in the languages of Europe and the Mediterranean, volume 1: Case studies*, ed. David Willis, Anne Breitbarth, and Christopher Lucas. Oxford: Oxford University Press.